

A LETTER,

ADDRESSED BY THE

REV. HEBER PLAYFAIR, D.D.,

TO THE

RT. HON. LORD JOHN RUSSELL,

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ALLEGED

PAPAL AGGRESSION

IN ENGLAND.

PRECEDED BY THE PREMIER'S LETTER TO THE BISHOP
OF DURHAM.

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INTRODUCTION.

In laying the following documents before the public of Upper Canada in pamphlet form, the Publisher not only complies with the oft-repeated wishes of many of his friends in Town and Country, but he also yields to his own earnest desire to see the important facts, so forcibly and so eloquently portrayed in Dr. PLAYFAIR'S celebrated letter, as extensively circulated as possible. He bespeaks, therefore, for these few pages, a careful and impartial perusal, trusting that the labour and expense which their publication have entailed upon him, will not be unproductive of some salutary consequences.

TORONTO, 31st MARCH, 1851.

TO THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF DURHAM :

MY DEAR LORD,—I agree with you in considering the “late aggression of the Pope upon our Protestantism” as “insolent and insidious,” and I therefore feel as indignant as you can do upon the subject.

I not only promoted, to the utmost of my power, the claims of the Roman Catholics to all civil rights, but I thought it right and even desirable, that the ecclesiastical system of the Roman Catholics should be the means of giving instruction to the numerous Irish immigrants in London and elsewhere, who, without such help, would have been left in heathen ignorance.

This might have been done, however, without any such innovation as that which we have now seen.

It is impossible to confound the recent measures of the Pope with the division of Scotland into dioceses by the Episcopal Church, or the arrangement of districts in England by the Wesleyan conferences.

There is an assumption of power in all the documents which have come from Rome—a pretension to supremacy over the realm of England, and a claim to sole and undivided sway, which is inconsistent with the Queen's supremacy, with the rights of our bishops and clergy, with the spiritual independence of the nation as asserted even in Roman Catholic times.

I confess, however, that my alarm is not equal to my indignation. Even if it shall appear that the ministers and the servants of the Pope in this country have transgressed the law, I feel persuaded that we are strong enough to repel any outward attacks. The liberty of Protestantism has been enjoyed too long in England to allow of any successful attempts to impose a foreign yoke upon our minds or consciences. No foreign prince or potentate will be permitted to fasten his fetters upon a nation which has so long and so nobly vindicated its right to freedom of opinion, civil, political, and religious.

Upon this subject, then, I will only say that the present state of the law shall be carefully examined, and the propriety of adopting any proceeding with reference to the recent assumptions of power deliberately considered.

There is a danger, however, which alarms me much more than any aggression of a foreign sovereign.

Clergymen of our own Church, who have subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles, and acknowledged, in explicit terms, the Queen's supremacy, have been the most forward in leading their flocks, “step by step, to the very verge of the precipice.” The honor paid to saints, the claim of infallibility for the Church, the superstitious use of the sign of the cross, the muttering the Liturgy so as to disguise the language in which it is written, the recommendation of auricular confessions, and the administration of penance and absolution—all these things are pointed out by our clergymen of the Church of England as worthy of adoption, and are now openly reprehended by the Bishop of London in his charge to the clergy of his Diocese.

What, then, is the danger to be apprehended from a foreign prince of no great power, compared to the danger within the gates from the unworthy sons of the Church of England herself?

I have little hope that the propounders and framers of these innovations will desist from their insidious course. But I rely with confidence on the people of England; and I will not bate a jot of heart or hope so long as the glorious principles and the immortal martyrs of the Reformation shall be held in reverence by the great mass of a nation which looks with contempt on the mummeries of superstition, and with scorn at the laborious endeavors which are now making to confine the intellect and enslave the soul.

Downing St., Nov. 4th.

I remain, with great respect, &c.,
JOHN RUSSELL.

A LETTER,
ADDRESSED TO THE RT. HON. LORD JOHN RUSSELL, ON THE
PAPAL AGGRESSION.
BY THE REV. HEBER PLAYFAIR, D.D.

MY LORD,—Many years have elapsed since I had the honor to address you. You were then pleased to favour me with no inconsiderable notice. Whether a similar honor awaits me now, I know not; but this I know, that, in thus publicly addressing you, I do no more than an act of duty. For religious controversy I have no desire, and the controversy of politics I do not believe to be in harmony with the office of a Clergyman of the Church of England. There are, however, times when it may be necessary to merge all individual considerations in the recognition of public good. This period has now arrived, and however commendable silence may be under other circumstances, I should look upon it now as a positive dereliction of duty.

My Lord, we are told that "the recent divisions of England into various districts, made by Papal authority, is subversive of the rights of Churchmen, and that in entering upon their sees, the Roman Catholic Bishops have acted in opposition to the Church of England." There is a magic power in every measure that emanates from Rome, for it awakens effectually the energies of Protestants, who look upon it as an aggression upon their spiritual franchise. I am not, therefore, surprised that the establishment of the papal hierarchy should have excited the passions of those, whose promotion in the Church is not unfrequently commensurate with their hostility to Popery. Nor am I more than surprised to find certain Bishops in our Church stooping from their elevated trusts of peace and charity, to countenance the warfare of an insolent and demoralizing bigotry. But that you, my Lord, with the memory of your illustrious ancestors fresh upon you—that you, the unwearied advocate of civil and religious liberty, who aided in the glorious work, which threw open the portals of the constitution to a proscribed race; that you should have thus acted unrestrained alike by the responsibility of your station and the feelings of millions, is a proceeding as much above all comprehension, as it is degrading to the character of a British statesman. If, however, there is no elevation of mind, there is, doubtless, much political tact in your Lordship's conduct. You labour, unsolicited, as the champion of the Church of England, to preserve her from the encroachments of an ancient foe, and, under this ingenious device, you endeavour to support your waning popularity. This is, indeed, conduct the most ignoble, and indicates the facility with which statesmen can employ the most unworthy means to retain power. The Church of England, my Lord, requires no such subterfuge, and, as one of her ministers, I disclaim all connection between her wants, and your political tactics. Already will your Lordship have anticipated my theme, the establishment of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy in England. Since the Emancipation Act there has been no subject so little understood, or productive of so much polemic virulence. The obloquy and threats that have emanated from it, reminds us of the dark era that preceded our enactments against the Roman Catholics. If misrepresentation and persecution be characteristic of the followers of Christ, most unquestionably we cannot deny it to the Roman Catholic Church. In every age, in

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every country, she has excited the worst passions of the worst men. Intrigue, treachery, and anarchy, have alternately been imputed to her. My Lord, I presume not to constitute myself her apologist. I am unequal to the task. Moreover she requires it not.—The nations she has raised from the savage state,—the fetters she has struck from the slave rusted by the tears of ages,—the myriads she has enkindled with the fire of religion,—the uniform tenor of a benevolent policy, as exalted for wisdom, as it was profound in judgment, display to the world an assemblage of learning, and religion, and benevolence, to which no institution under heaven can afford a parallel. This, my Lord is the evidence of impartial history, and it affords a supreme refutation to the bigotry and intolerance which disgrace our country.

My Lord, in your memorable letter to the Bishop of Durham, you declare that “no foreign prince or potentate will be permitted to fasten his fetters upon a nation which has so long, and so nobly, vindicated its right to freedom of opinion, civil, political, and religious;” “that the liberty of Protestantism has been enjoyed too long in England to allow of any successful attempt to impose a foreign yoke upon our minds and consciences,” and that the religious practices of the Roman Catholic Church are “superstitious mummeries.” Let us, my Lord, calmly look into these assertions; and first, that the Pope shall not fasten his fetters upon us. My Lord, I for one do not dread the attempt. I know of no one individual, lay or clerical, learned or unlearned, noble or ignoble, that does dread it. I have not even heard of one. Do you, yourself, my Lord, really dread it? In other words, do you really believe in what you have written to the Bishop of Durham? Will you forgive me if I say it is the wretched subterfuge of a more wretched fear of losing office? No one fears that the Pope will attempt to fasten his fetters upon this country. The act would be worse than madness. The Pope has no temporal power in England, no, not one iota. *And you know it, my Lord.* Were he to attempt to assume it, the Roman Catholics would rush to arms, and drive him from our shores. This is their avowed and acknowledged doctrine. *And, my Lord, you know it.* I pass by the cruel and withering doctrines, which the perusal of this portion of your missive suggests. It would not become me to dwell upon the fiendish vandalism you have provoked, nor the wretched distinction you have acquired by the sacrifice of political principle. Turn we then, my Lord, to your assurance that “the liberty of Protestantism has been enjoyed too long in England to allow of any successful attempt to impose a foreign yoke upon our minds and consciences.” It were truly an exercise of charity, to believe that you were profoundly ignorant of the meaning of what you have written, for a knowledge to the contrary could not fail to attribute to you the most discreditabie motives. The Government of the Roman Catholic Church is essentially Episcopal. Her Bishops are to-day, in England, precisely what they were seven years since—with this simple distinction that now their titles are derived from the towns in which they reside, recently they were derived from places which probably they had never seen. Until lately they were termed Vicars Apostolic—now they are termed Bishops in Ordinary. By the late system they were removable at the will of the Pope—by the establishment of the present system he has resigned that authority. No Roman Catholic Vicar Apostolic ever assumed to officiate in this country until he had first been authorized by the Pope; but every Vicar Apostolic up to the present time has been authorized by the Pope, therefore, according to your Lordship’s doctrine, they were aggressors. Many have been appointed within my remembrance. Yet had there come forth no Prime Minister to parade his fanatical rhodomontade before the public—no

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starving curates and hungry adventurers to vituperate their unmeasured invectives. The Papal Hierarchy is purely a spiritual government. It *does not*, because it *cannot*, affect the government of our most gracious Queen. The Roman Catholic Bishops are as far removed from all interference with the secular government of our Queen, as our Protestant Bishop at Jerusalem, our Protestant Bishop in France, nay, our Protestant Bishop in Italy itself, are removed from, interference with the governments of those respective countries. In name, then, only, is the difference between their Hierarchical and Vicars Apostolic form of government.

What, then, means your threat, my Lord, that on this subject "the law shall be examined?" In one breath you boast that "England vindicates the right to freedom of religious opinion;" in the next, declare that, because of its exercise, the establishment of a Roman Catholic hierarchy, "the law shall be examined!" By what process of reasoning are we to reconcile these contradictions? Pity and indignation alternately arrest the mind in the effort to eke out your meaning. Why have you, my Lord, shrunk to the dimensions of an ordinary platform declaimer against Popery? My Lord, it is neither wise nor prudent to talk of "examining the law," in reference to the Roman Catholics. They are composed of matter equally inflammable with ourselves; and desperate must be the man that would fling the sparks of a fearful ignition amongst them. Conjointly with us they pay the same taxes, obey the same laws, live under the same constitution, and fight the same battles for its preservation. On the blood of Roman Catholics, commingled with our own, has floated for centuries, proudly and triumphantly, the ark of civil and religious liberty. If France were to invade our shores—she who nurses her spirit of revenge with the burning memory of her defeat at Waterloo—would you talk of examining the law in reference to Roman Catholics? Shall they who man our fleets, and fill our armies, whose bravery and fidelity have never been surpassed—shall they whose Bishop, at the solicitation of our English Government, went to Newfoundland and preserved his people from a general disaffection to the mother country, and for which our Government awarded him a palace and an income—shall they who furnish the nation with the best magistrates, and most peaceful citizens, be thus wantonly and ignorantly insulted? My Lord, I know of no crime so black, no villainy so atrocious, as the work of religious persecution. Beware, I beseech you, how you fulfil the prophecies of those who confound the inspirations of a merciful Deity, with the sectarianism of a base sophistry; who trade upon the credulity of the flocks "committed to their charge," and convert the principles of the decalogue into a nefarious commerce. Beware how you give signal success to the rampant bigotry of our Irish Clergy, who gangrene society to its depth and its extremities, with the poison of their vulgar prejudices. Beware how you extend the panoply of obsolete Acts of Parliament over that living mass of vice and corruption—the impassioned followers of wild fanaticism. Beware, my Lord, I conjure you, lest you disinter the ashes of the worst characters of human nature—lest you infuse a fiendish ferocity into their resuscitated spirit—lest Smithfield should again blaze out in fires of persecution, and our best citizens, and most learned men be immolated upon the altars of our Protestant prejudices. Already has your Letter disturbed the frame work of our social condition, and the absorbing topic of the day, the Hierarchy and penal enactments, has deprived us, as a nation, of the character of religious freedom. It will be well for yourself, my Lord, if you are able to restore tranquility to the country. Your conduct is the experimentalism of a wretched policy, aggravated by the positive worthlessness of your political

career. How keenly do we now feel the great loss sustained in the death of Sir Robert Peel. Never was contrast so glorious to one statesman--so humiliating to the other. It is more than Iulus by the side of Aeneas.

My Lord, at the conclusion of your letter, you think proper to designate the religious practices of the Roman Catholic Church a "superstitious mummary." Unfeignedly, my Lord, I am sorry that you have done so. On the subject of the practices and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, the greatest and best of men have differed. With reverence, and judgment, and learning have these points been examined. Still was there difficulty--there was still disagreement. But with you, my Lord, it is otherwise. You seem to experience no difficulty in determining the practices of the Roman Catholic Church to be a "superstitious mummary." Give me leave to ask, by what authority do you sit in judgment upon so momentous a subject? What power has constituted you a tribunal of appeal? What are your Lordship's qualifications for the office? An aptitude for the employment of political stratagems that libel the religion of the largest body of Christians in the Universe--an aptitude which concentrates into a common focus the incarnate bigotry of the country, and the mindless warfare of your favorite Scotch Presbyterian. But your qualifications end not here. In the dramatic world you are known for the signal failures of laboured bombast, and in the political world for the discomfiture of a "finalty" of policy. In the one not even your name and position could command success--whilst in the other you are tolerated by the satellites that revolve around you for place and emolument. There is scarcely an index in the political thermometer, at which you have not arrived, from the burning heat of reducing the number of our Bishops, to the frigid policy of "Bibles and claymores." Yet you are the man, my Lord, who presumes to judge the religion of two hundred millions--that has, in hostility, arrayed class against class--that has termed the religious practices of our Jeromes and Austins, of Charlemagne and Sainted Edward, of the heroes of Poitiers and Cressy, a "superstitious mummary." My Lord, Protestant though I be, and sincerely attached to my church, I hesitate not to avow that you have grievously injured her. The intolerant spirit evoked--the angry feelings aroused--the persecuting power, and assumed infallibility of our Church, which are the direct consequences of your letter, will lead to greater defection from the Church of England than the writings of the Tractarians, or the preaching of Rome could ever effect. How have you, my Lord, strengthened the argument of the Infidel, who believes the differences of Christian churches to be the inherent weakness of their religion. How have you encouraged that latitudinarian policy, which inundated France at the close of the last century? It is true, my Lord, that Infidelity is nobly combatted--and that the results are evident in the progress of Christianity. It is no less true that the honour of the struggle belongs not exclusively to us. If the practical results of Infidelity be no longer visible amongst the evidences of revealed truth, compiled from the rocks, and floods, and fields, its standard of moral rectitude, we must thank the Roman Catholic Church equally with our own. If that edifice of every unclean passion, of learning without religion, and genius without principle, be razed to the ground--if the name of its architect, the greatest genius of modern philosophy, revive the remembrance of the conflict of Christianity with the infidel school of Voltaire, D'Alembert, and Diderot, we must thank the Roman Catholic Church equally with our own. An undivided glory is not ours: but be ours the moral courage to acknowledge it.

How is it, my Lord, that for years and years, from boyhood to manhood, from the Tracts published by religious fanaticism, to the volumes written by hireling defamation, our minds have been filled with the stratagems and horrors of the Papacy. The human mind was said to be enslaved by it, and the freedom of the gospel to have fled at its approach. And even now in the middle of the nineteenth century--in the full blaze of science and literature--those monstrous calumnies are believed, and even amongst those who knew better, the instances of a generous defence are exceedingly rare. And notwithstanding all this, the Papacy is on the increase. From her persecutions and her blood, missionaries have sprung up, carrying her doctrines, *per ignes et hostes*, over the whole earth. And how is it so? This is a question, my Lord, which as Churchmen we should propose to ourselves, but which neither misrepresentation nor bigotry, nor intolerance can answer. However painful may be the acknowledgment, it is only an homage due to truth to declare, that the Priesthood of the Papacy has long since shamed the general conduct of our clergy. Be their religious practices "superstitious mummeries" or not, they wield, for the most benevolent purposes, the greatest engine ever wielded by human power. Their regularity of life--their abnegation of self--their general developement of the most refined humanity--their attendance in the sick chamber undismayed by the most fatal disease, where they frequently inhale the incipency of their own death--the instructive resignation under which they fall victims of the sublimest charity, entitle them in a supreme degree, to the sanctifying virtues of religion, and illustrate their excellent conservatism of peace and order. I do not, therefore, marvel at the hostility arrayed against a movement that presents in relief the unquestionable superiority of the Papal Priesthood over the Established Church. My Lord, although I am firmly attached to the principles of the Church of England, I cannot deny my testimony of respect and veneration to the virtue and excellence of the Roman Catholic Church. I do not understand the prevalent doctrine which attributes exclusive excellence to its own little community. If I correctly understand my own Church, this is not the character of her teaching.

My Lord, I am no friend to the Pope of Rome, beyond the admiration of an enlarged humanity, and heroic benevolence. Deep penetration, profound judgment, and gigantic grasp of intellect, will not be denied to Pius the Ninth, by the most superficial observer of the age. A man of this stamp will always command respect; and I would presume, upon your Lordship's concurrence in pitying the stunted intellect that is unable to appreciate him. If the Pope has acted in strange departure from these great guides--if he has usurped the authority of our Church--surely his bishops are amenable to the law, who are already found obeying his behests. They are within reach, with Cardinal Wiseman at their head; and if they have violated constitutional rights, why not arrest them? Arrest them, my Lord, by all means. But they will cheerfully endure it! Enact new laws, impregnated with the spirit of judicial murder, and try these spiritual aggressors by them. This also they will endure. Pack a jury, secure a verdict, and let a religious Lord Jeffrys pronounce sentence. Good, my Lord, but stop not here. Strike down the power of a free press, choke the channels of justice throughout the country, convert England into an Aceldama, and let the atrocities of the French Revolution grow pale in the contrast of Protestant extermination of Christianity. Nay, my Lord, hesitate not, but let the work be accomplished, and the spirit of the rabble, and the pickpockets of the country, be gratified. Let the greatest conservatism of peace and order be prostrated to the ground, and the Moloch of infidelity triumph in its ruins. But,

my Lord, these men will not falter. They will endure all you can conceive, and your myrmidons inflict. With the example of their martyred ancestors before them, they will resign themselves without a murmur to the sacrifice. It may, however, be prudent to pause even at the threshold of the act. My Lord, this is not the age for persecution. We are an intelligent people, and are sensitively alive to all injustice. To attempt persecution on account of religion may gratify a party, but the gratification may be purchased by the stability of the empire. Measures of this character stamp the country where they are perpetrated, with eternal infamy. They are the materials with which history builds her great edifice. Pause, then, my Lord, I beseech you, before you prove to the world that in England the freedom of religious opinion is checked, that the liberty of conscience is penal, and that her Church is sustained by the elements of *fulmen brutum*. Let us not forget our dignity as a nation and a church, by any act unworthy of one or the other. If the Papacy be instituted by human wisdom, she will fall; within her own bosom she will bear the seeds of dissolution and decay; if our Church is of God and truth, what can we have to fear from such an establishment? Fear, my Lord, argues an ignoble mind; let us, therefore, remove its evidences by ceasing to exhibit our paroxysms and contortions. Besides, whom have we to fear? A few Roman Catholic Bishops and Priests, whose united followers do not constitute a decimal part of our population!

Really, my Lord, the idea is so absurd, that it would indicate an absence of respect were I to attempt to refute it. The law benches are Protestant—the Parliament is Protestant—the army is Protestant—the navy is Protestant—all England is Protestant—and yet our Prime Minister states that because a handful of Bishops have taken their titles from their places of residence, the law shall be examined! Is this madness, or meanness, or what is it? My Lord, I am bold but I cannot help it. The cause more than justifies me. See you not that your threats will strengthen the Church of the Papacy; that notwithstanding the wealth of the country, the influence of our Church, and the power of the state, the Papacy is progressing so rapidly that you find it is necessary to enact laws to arrest her progress? Rest assured my Lord, no law can enchain the mind, however it may punish its expression. Religion is a spirituality, which it is not in the power of parliaments to annihilate. Beware, then, how you presume to lay hands upon this sacred thing. Elevate yourself above all unworthy offices. My Lord, the Church of England is not in danger; and if the ark of truth were to totter, it should not be sustained by the unholy hand that has written, it may be, the proscription of millions. O! how have you fallen from your high state! O! the narrow dimensions to which a wretched fanaticism has reduced you! You have done what neither Fox nor Pitt would have dared to do; what the eloquence of Burke would have clothed with awful responsibility, what the judgment of Canning would have shunned, and the genius of Peel would have spurned as a mindless ambition. Supported by an active bigotry, and the refined ingenuity of Episcopal malice, you thus stand isolated from every thing that dignifies the character of a British statesman. The base minds that cheer you, and the speculating sycophants that do your beck, will die with the cause that produced them. But with you, my Lord, it is not so. An unenviable distinction is yours. Already has history claimed you for her own, and she will transmit you to posterity as the man who entered the temple of the constitution, and dared to snatch from her hallowed altar the fire of 'civil and religious liberty.'

I have the honor to be, my Lord, your Lordship's obedient and humble servant,
Tirvington, near Durham, 1st Dec., 1850.

HEBER PLAYFAIR.

